

Wu shows a path forward for DPP

Written by Tommy Lin 林德福

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Enoch Wu (吳勝元) faced tough odds in a predominantly Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) constituency in Taipei's legislative by-election on Sunday. As the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate in an area covering Zhongshan (中山) and northern Songshan (松山) districts, Wu early in the campaign resisted pressure from within his party to change what they saw as a losing strategy.

Although he was defeated, Wu managed to secure a record number of votes for the DPP in a KMT stronghold.

Former DPP legislator Lin Cho-shui (林錫山) commended Wu on his performance, as his prospects were slim given headwinds from the electorate and problems the party was experiencing at the time.

Compared with the past three legislative elections in the area, Wu not only garnered more votes than his predecessors, but scored the most votes the DPP has ever received in the Zhongshan area.

With government setbacks already hindering his chances — disputes on how to redistribute a tax surplus, and the party dealing with controversies in Tainan and Hsinchu — Wu's result exceeded expectations.

His impressive performance has shown that DPP supporters have not lost faith in the party. Their solidarity helped the party recover from a huge defeat in last year's local elections as they stood up and walked with their heads high.

Wu's campaign is worth studying. In its initial stages, he insisted on not letting any member with connections to organized crime become involved, which caused offense to some senior party members and threatened his connections with local party factions.

He was adamant on leading a positive campaign, which some people found naive and

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idealistic, but he stood his ground without showing an ounce of fear as KMT members goaded him and called him a coward for not agreeing to a debate.

The results show that Wu ran the right kind of campaign. His performance was an important metric of the DPP's ability to make a comeback.

With a presidential election in sight next year, the DPP should learn from Wu's campaign. It needs to remain resolved and determined to appeal to Taiwanese who share values supporting Taiwan's sovereignty.

The military preparedness that Wu campaigned for showed that President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) restoration of one-year compulsory military service has been accepted as a long-term measure for the nation's security, regardless of the policy's effects on the next election.

This kind of vision is bound to rally support. Having blind faith in local "vote captains," some politicians allowed their campaigns to become compromised by "black gold" — the involvement of criminals and ill-gotten wealth in politics — with some believing that such arrangements were par for the course.

In this election, voters showed support for Wu's maverick spirit of engaging in a clean election, rejecting the lure of "black gold," just as Vice President William Lai (賴清德) did when he ran in the Tainan mayoral election in 2014.

In the wake of the Sunflower movement, which was largely organized via social media, Taiwanese politicians have become obsessed with the power of online campaigning. As remarks on the Internet need to be melodramatic, exaggerated and sensational enough to go viral, the practice has often triggered mudslinging and smearing, even attacking those who are on the same side yet hold different opinions.

Candidates can sometimes win online debates while losing votes in the process. Wu's positive, rational and caring approach to the election shows the truth behind Aesop's fable The North Wind and the Sun — only the sun is able to attract public trust in the long game.

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After the DPP experienced its catastrophic defeat last year, Wu's impressive election result shows that the public has not given up on the DPP. It provides incentive for the DPP to continue reforms that create a new image and offer voters a fresh start.

It should have been an act of loyalty when Premier Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌) defended the government's policies by going head-to-head with legislators. Now that the DPP is doing some soul-searching, is it still appropriate for Su to continue being stubborn like the "north wind"? Should he be making promotional clips of the Cabinet's accomplishments in the style of TikTok short videos? These questions are worth some thought.

When the governing party has failed to win public support, it is a convention in democratic countries for the premier to step down and take responsibility. That might not mean the governing party is at fault, but the public is demanding change.

The president could take this opportunity to make a bold move with a Cabinet reshuffle that promises a better future for the party that protects Taiwanese sovereignty.

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Translated by Rita Wang

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